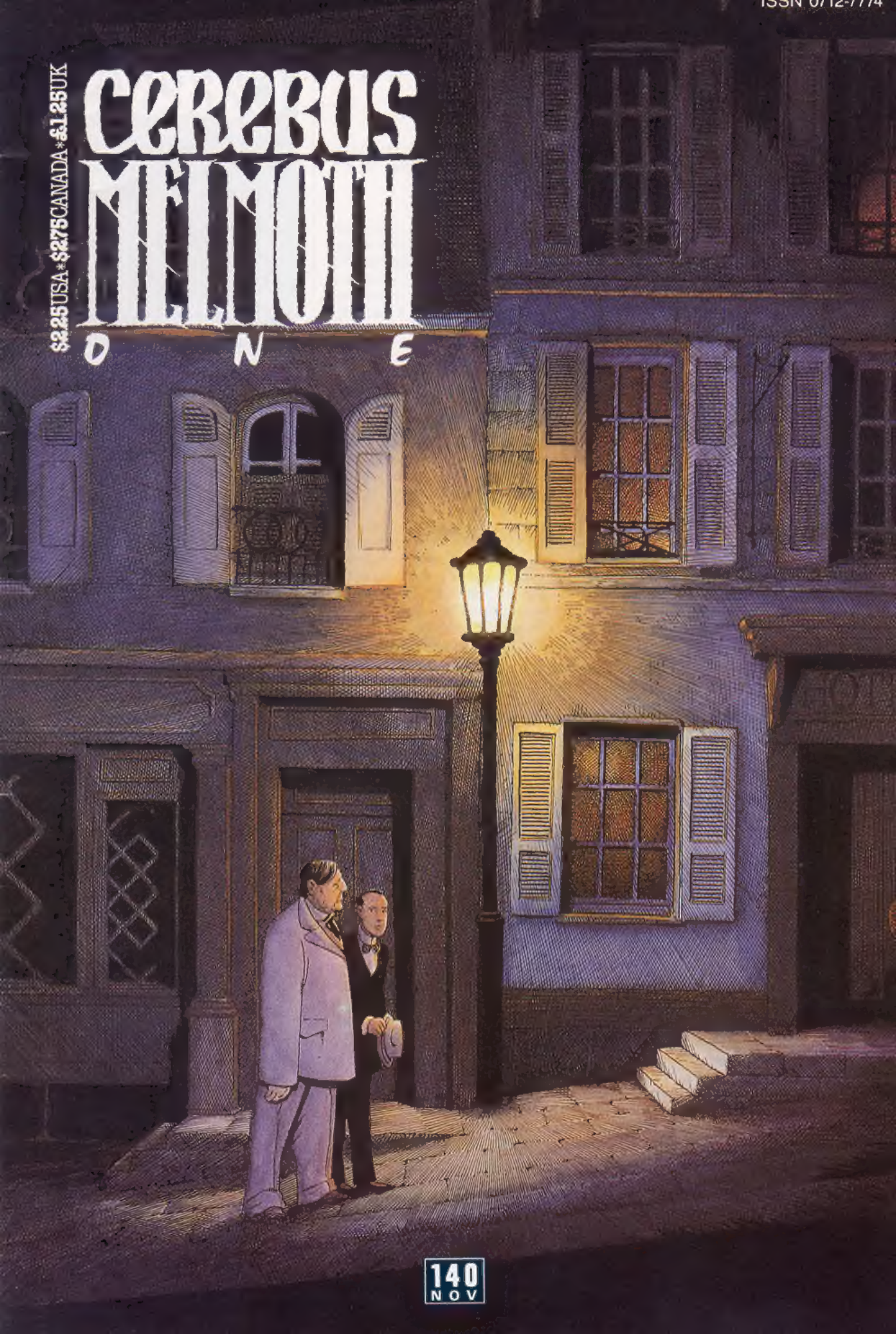
ISSN 0712-7774

$2.25USA*$2.75CANADA*£1.25UK

# CEREBUS

# MELMOTH

DONE



140
NOV

# NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

I just had a check-up. I'm not dying. I'm not even sick. I walk up nearly twenty flights of stairs a day. I exercise for an hour and a half every night. I don't smoke drugs any more. I don't drink alcohol anymore.

I feel like a big bag of shit.

It's probably just today (September 19). But I don't know. Just finished answering the mail that came in which took most of the day. Almost every letter was in reference to the end of *Jaka's Story* and Jaka's abortion. All the letters from women offered their opinions on the abortion debate; praised my writing and the artwork Ger and I do. And usually mentioned "Boy, get ready for an avalanche of hate mail." Oddly enough, it was only the male letters that *lectured* me on my politically incorrect positions, my "anti-feminism".

I am not a feminist.

Last time I checked that wasn't against the law. I *used* to be. A real Alan Alda type type. Have you noticed that the more intelligent women aren't feminists either? The ones who *were* feminists when that meant the advocacy of freedom (women's lib) and fairness? That's when I was a feminist. When the goal was a level playing field. Equal opportunity. Affirmative action pushed me part-way out the door; divy up the jobs so women get half of them. Like the Ontario College of Art which will not hire any men until the faculty is 50% men and 50% women. Affirmative for whom? At the expense of whom? National day-care in political platforms pushed me a little further out the door. Spending $10,000 in taxpayer's money to take care of a waitress's kids for a year while she goes out and works, paying $4,000 a year in taxes. Margaret Thatcher authorizing wide-scale death in the Falkland Islands. Excuse me, but wasn't the idea of female leaders supposed to be that they would negotiate instead of using violence to settle things? I'm almost all the way out the door on that one.

When I heard Cokie Roberts mention that she has two teen-aged children (I would still do it until her eyes changed colour); one male and one female. The male had to register for the draft at a specific age *by law*. The daughter *doesn't* have to, but must be *allowed* in the army if she *chooses* . . . well, that's not fair! They should both *have* to register or they should *both* be allowed military service as an *option*.

At that point I realized Cokie Roberts and I were both out the door and down the hall, discussing fairness in a world gone politically correct.

Barbara Amiel (another good intellect I admire, though I frequently disagree with her) joined us, pointing out that if you are going to *force* a man to spend most of his adult life financing a child he helped create, it is not *fair* to say he has no choice in whether that fetus is aborted or not. To which I add; if I own something, I pay for its up-keep. If I own half of it, I pay half of its upkeep or I pay its upkeep half the time. If *you* own something *you* should pay for its upkeep. We've already established through our laws that a baby is an enlarged female organ completely under her control. Why do I have to spend eighteen years financing a part of *your* body? It is the law yes but it is *unfair* – which was what feminism, women's liberation was about when I was in favour of it; making that which was unfair fair or at least fairer.

"Take back the night" marches. Take *back* the night? The night belonged exclusively to women at one time, did it? Like the letter-writer who suggested all men should have a ten o'clock curfew so women can walk the streets safely. That's fair is it? How about "Share the night"?

I have been a white anglo-saxon protestant male all of my life and from the time I was fourteen (1970) I have been told just how wretched and unappealing and monstrous and vile a thing that is to be; in entertainment, newspapers, television; *everywhere*. And now I have *other* white anglo-saxon protestant males writing to tell me to change the way I think. I don't like it any better than women or minorities liked it.

And even if they make it illegal to not be, I still won't be a feminist.

Because the quest for fairness has gone elsewhere.

In my opinion.


# CEREBUS

NO. 140 NOVEMBER 1990

**DAVE SIM**
President

**GERHARD**
Vice-President

**MONIQUE KAPTEIN**
Administrative Assistant

**LINDA BERZINS**
Typesetting


**MELMOTH**
a short story
•
(Cerebus 139 to Cerebus 150)

Jnx_Scanz_HaCsA !!!


CEREBUS IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC. P.O. BOX 1674 STN. C KITCHENER ONTARIO CANADA N2G 4R2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PRINTED IN CANADA BY PRENEY PRINT & LITHO INC., WINDSOR, ONTARIO.

PRINTED IN CANADA

"Oscar Wilde, the crime of which you have been convicted is so bad that one has to put stern restraint upon oneself, from describing in language which I would rather not use, the sentiments which must rise to the breast of every man of honour who has heard the details of these terrible trials. It is no use for me to address you. People who can do these things must be dead to all sense of shame, and one cannot hope to produce any effect upon them. It is the worst case that I have ever tried. That you, Wilde, have been the centre of a circle of extensive corruption among young men, it is impossible to doubt. I shall under such circumstances be expected to pass the severest sentence that the law of England allows. In my judgement it is wholly inadequate for such a case as this. The sentence of the court is that you are to be imprisoned and kept to hard labour for two years."

**"Horrible**
**as are the dead**
**when they rise from**
**their tombs;**
**the living**
**who come out from**
**their tombs**
**are more**
**horrible**
**still."**

Oscar Wilde

MELMOTH

refused. We went to a small cafe in the Lower City where he insisted on drinking absinthe. He walked there and back with some difficulty but seemed fairly well. Only

YOU'VE HAD NO LUCK IN LOCATING THE THIRD PART OF 'DAUGHTER OF PALNU'?
NO, OSCAR. NONE OF THE 'READS' STORES SEEMS TO CARRY IT...
I FEEL A KINSHIP, ROBBIE, WITH THE AUTHOR... BEYOND OUR HAVING THE SAME GIVEN NAME I MEAN
WHEN HE DESCRIBES THE YOUNG GIRL KEEPING HER NURSE OUT OF THE ROOM BY GRIPPING THE INSIDE HANDLE OF THE DOOR...
THE PASSAGE SEEMS INTERMINABLE AND CONSTITUTES MOST OF THE SECOND PART...
AND THAT, IT WOULD APPEAR IS EXACTLY THE AUTHOR'S POINT
FOR 'HER,' THE MOMENT OF CRISIS SEEMS TO GO ON FOREVER
SO HE ENDEAVOURS TO CREATE THAT SAME EXPERIENCE IN THE READER'S MIND...

SIMPLE ENOUGH.
AN UNRELENTING PASSAGE TO DESCRIBE AN UNRELENTING EVENT... ONE THINKS TO ONE'S SELF
'OF COURSE -- WHY HADN'T I THOUGHT OF THAT?'
UNLESS ONE IS AN EDITOR OF COURSE, IN WHICH CASE, ONE THINKS TO ONE'S SELF
'HOW UNDULY LENGTHY -- THE AUTHOR MUST LEARN THAT 'LESS IS MORE'
'I SHALL INSTRUCT HIM IN'
'IN THE'
OSCAR?

A SLIGHT GIDDINESS, ROBBIE
THAT'S ALL...
THE LESSON, I WOULD SUPPOSE, IS THAT ONE SHOULD ALWAYS ENDEAVOUR TO SELECT AN HOTEL DOWNHILL FROM ONE'S PREFERRED DRINKING ESTABLISHMENT
YES, OSCAR.
I'M QUITE SURE THAT IS THE LESSON
THE TITLE ISN'T HIS
I'M CERTAIN OF THAT.

I PRACTICALLY OVER-LOOKED IT BECAUSE OF THE TITLE.
"DAUGHTER OF PALNU"
THERE IT WAS SURROUNDED BY "SOLDIER OF PALNU" "MERCHANT OF PALNU" "WINDS OF PALNU" "PASSIONS OF PALNU" "RULER OF PALNU" AND "TOWERS OF PALNU" ...
ALL OF WHOM SEEMED TO BE LEANING AWAY FROM HER
AS IF LITERACY WERE SOME MANNER OF VIRULENT CONTAGION
INSTEAD OF AN ENDANGERED SPECIES.
QUITE SO...
QUITE SO.

THE DECLINE IN QUALITY HAS BEEN PRECIPITOUS...
IN THE READS STORES, I MEAN.
BLOODY MURDER
EXPLICIT SEXUALITY
MINDLESS VIGILANTES...
AH YES.
THE 'MOUTH-BREATHING PUBLIC'S VORACIOUS APPETITE FOR THAT WHICH IT.. OSTENSIBLY.... DEPLORES
YOU AREN'T SURPRISED ARE YOU?
FRANKLY YES.
I THOUGHT THE CIRINISTS WHATEVER ELSE MIGHT BE SAID OF THEM WOULD... WELL...
CIRINISTS TRAFFIC ONLY IN THE ACTUAL, ROBBIE
THAT IS WHY IT IS A CAPITAL CRIME TO BE A DANCER IN A TAVERN...
BUT QUITE PERMISSIBLE FOR A LICENSED AUTHOR TO WRITE ABOUT ONE...

BUT THE IMPLIED CRITICISMS IN 'DAUGHTER OF PALNU'
.. OF C RIN HERSELF
THEY DON'T MAKE THAT CONNECTION
TO THE CIRINISTS THE AUTHOR IS THE R ONLY CONCERN
ONCE HE'S BEEN APPROVED AS A 'JOLLY CHAP' BY EVERY MOTHER WHO HAS KNOWN HIM SINCE INFANCY
HE COULD WRITE A RECIPE BOOK ON THE PREPARATION AND SERVING OF 'CIRINIST CUTLETS' AND IT WOULD BE OF NO INTEREST OR CONCERN TO THEM WHAT SO EVER.
BUT
DON'T THEY SEE A DANGER?
TO THEM?
TO THEIR MOVEMENT ?
YOU'VE SEEN THE AVERAGE READS CUSTOMER, ROBBIE THIN .. NERVOUS MYOPIC . SPOTTED FACE.

DOES HE STRIKE YOU AS BEING ANY THREAT?
TO ANY ONE-
OR ANY THING?
EAGERLY DEVOURING SOME FABRICATED TALE OF BLOOD-SOAKED MAYHEM..
LIKE A BLISSFUL SUCKLING AT HIS MOTHER'S BREAST
HIS CLOSEST BRUSH WITH DANGER THE OCCASIONAL PAPER CUT

HE IS A GOOD SHEEP!
AND AS THE CIRINISTS SAY -
'GOOD SHEEP'
MAKE GOOD HUSBANDS'

ay well. Only I thought he had suddenly aged in face and remarked to Reggie next day how different he looked when up and dressed. He appeared compar...

ONE OF THE HAPPIEST OF CIRIN'S MANY 'HAPPY ACCIDENTS'
(INSOFAR AS THE ENTRENCHMENT OF CIRINISM IS CONCERNED)
IS COMPLETE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
THOUGH I DOUBT SHE REALIZES THE SIGNIFICANCE
SIGNIFICANT HOW?
IN A SOCIETY WHERE DISSENTING VIEWPOINTS ARE SUPPRESSED THOSE VIEWPOINTS ARE POTENT AND DANGEROUS.
WHERE DISSENT IS TOLERATED, IT RAPIDLY BECOMES QUAINT AND IS VIEWED AS UN-SOPHISTICATED.
PEOPLE MERELY AMUSE THEMSELVES WITH THE EXPRESSION OF CONTRARY OPINION

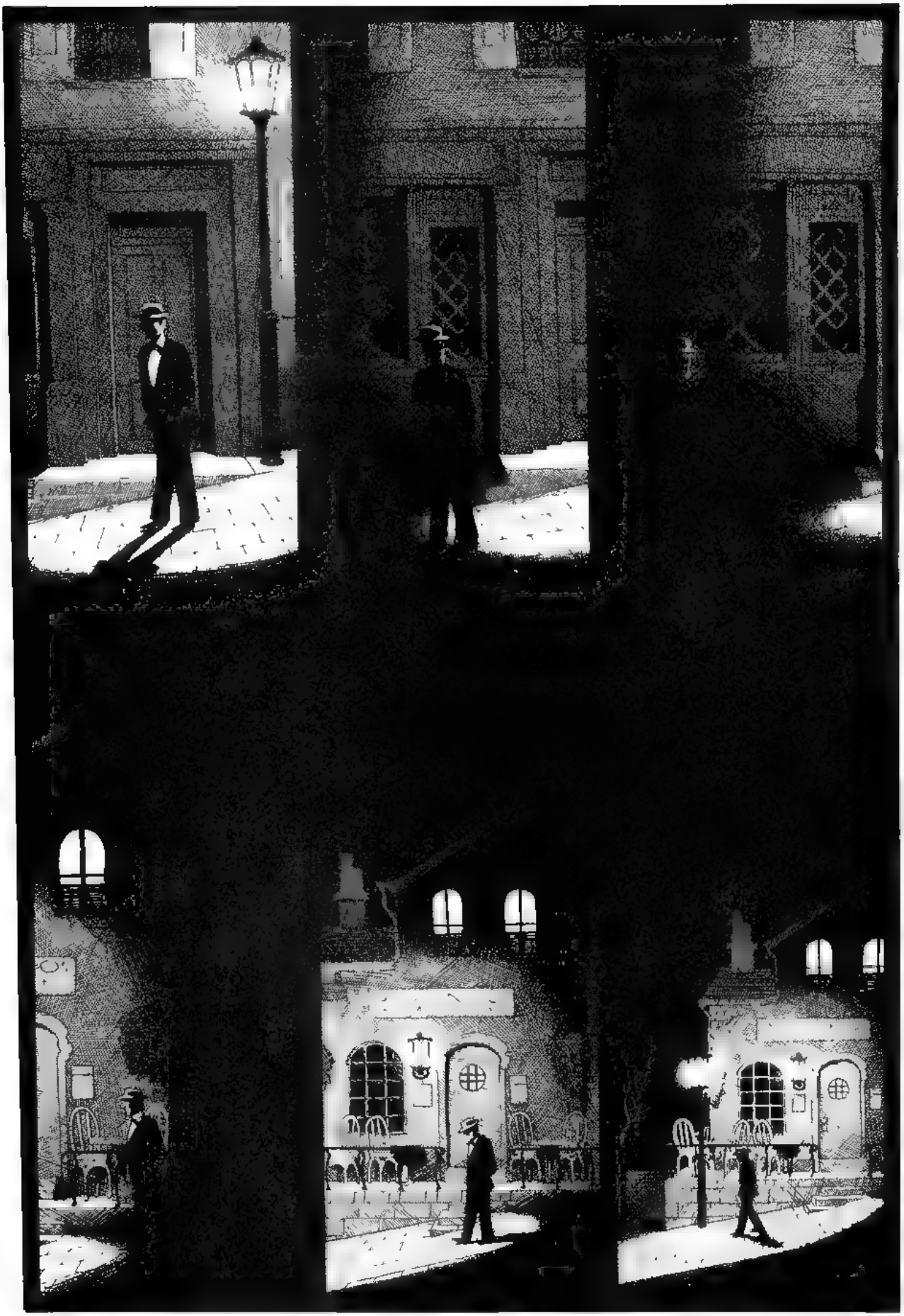
THEY 'TRY ON' IDEAS AND IDEOLOGIES-- AS THEY WOULD A NEW HAT OR BOUTONNIÈRE
DISCARDING THEM JUST AS READILY
CONFORMITY THEN SUPPLANTS AWARENESS AS THE CORNERSTONE OF WISDOM
GETTING ALONG BECOMES THE HIGHEST AMBITION OF THE GOOD CITIZEN'
LEAVING THE FORCES OF TRUE OPPRESSION
THE PERMANENT HIERARCHIES ECONOMIC RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL
THOSE FOR WHOM POWER IS NOT A MEANS BUT AN END IN ITSELF.
TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR..
M'SIEL MELMOTH
M'SIEL ROSS
BONSOIR

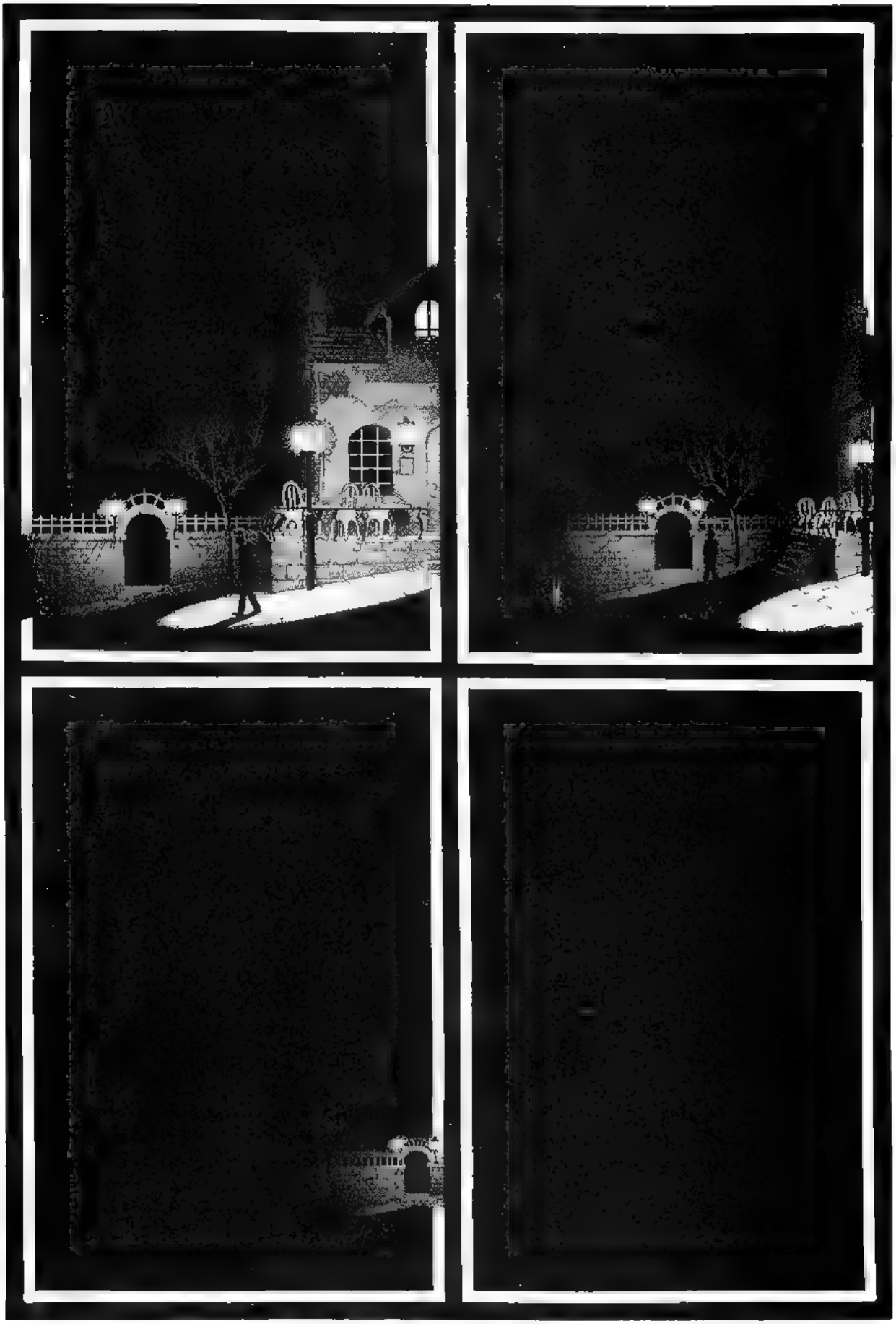
DUPOIRIER
BON SOIR
BON SOIR
MISTER MELMOTH
THE DANSEUR
AH
HE IS HERE
TO CHANGE YOUR BANDAGE

REGGIE WILL BE HERE TOMORROW
REGGIE
HE'LL BE HERE TOMORROW
FOR LUNCH
MM?

SPLENDID
--SPLENDID
THE THREE OF US LUNCH IN MY ROOMS..
AND CHAMPAGNE DUPOIRIER?
OUI, MSIEU MELMOTH
MY BEST CHAMPAGNE
MIND YOUR STEP
SWEET DREAMS ROBBIE
SLEEP WELL
AND YOU
SEBASTIEN'
SLEEP WELL

CLICK





# AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Dave (if I may call you Dave though this is my first letter to you)

I must say that Cerebus is a joy, one of the few jewels that shine forth from the mundane bedrock that is representative of the majority of today's comic books. Though I only started reading about halfway through *Jaka's Story*, I have already collected almost half of the back issues, and I buy any back issues I don't have when I can find them (which isn't very often around here). Cerebus has quickly become my favourite (along with Doom Patrol) and I always read it last so I can fully savor it without having to think about what I'm going to read next. I've even gone so far as to bug my friend to death about how great the book is, so he will start buying it. And he did, even though he once said something to the effect that he would never buy some "stupid comic book with an aardvark as the main character" (Hi Mike!). I made him see the error of his ways, though, Dave, and now he's hooked.

I must say however, that I notice a similarity between you and Harlan Ellison. It's not the obvious writing ability (though you're both damned fine writers), but in the popularity you've both established for yourselves in your particular genres. Or perhaps I should say the lack of your deserved popularity. I mean, you've both won awards (and should win more) and have had a certain critical success, but neither you nor Ellison are what I would call massively popular.

Picture it. When I go into a bookstore looking for Ellison, or a comic book store looking for your work, I find it extremely difficult to find. You might say that it's because of the cultural wasteland I live in, but I think that's only part of it. I think that you and Ellison deserve to be massively popular because of the quality of your works, but I continually find other people getting the adulation you deserve. In Ellison's case, hack writers like Stephen King and Clive Barker make all of the money, and their books virtually take up rows of shelves in the bookstores. While they may be okay to read for light entertainment, I don't think they are anywhere near Ellison's class.

The same may be said about your work. When I go to my local comic book store, there is usually one or two slots where Cerebus and the Cerebus reprints are placed, usually a few paltry copies in each slot. There is also a small box where about 30 back issues (none below the 90's, and several duplicates) are located, under the tables where the Marvel and DC back issues are. For the most part, Marvels and DCs line the shelves, the walls, and the majority of the back issue bins. While they certainly publish more titles, your work as well as back issues from previous Aardvark-Vanaheim titles cannot be found (it was different in the few comic book stores I visited when in North Carolina, but unfortunately I didn't have the cash at the time).

It's really sad to me that more people don't know what great work both you and Ellison put out, work which will maintain its quality long after yer Kings and Barkers, or yer McFarlanes and Byrnes fade quickly from memory to the point that you pick one of their works up and wonder what the hell it was about (though you may have read it the week before)!

Sorry for going on so long, but I just wanted to get that off my chest. I try to push your work (and Ellison's) on anyone who'll listen, and I want you to know that you've got full support and appreciation. I'll be with you till #300.

Sincerely,

Christopher Cochran
P.O. Box 139
Black Creek, WI
USA 54106

**********

Dear Dave

Recently I've had a fascinating interaction that seems to fit one of the running themes in "Aardvark Comments". It's been so bizarre I figured you (or perhaps other *Cerebus* readers, if you print this missive) would be among the few people who could relate to it.

For three weeks in June, I took a C programming course at work. (C is a computer programming language although that's not very relevant here). One of my classmates was a woman we'll call Kathy (not her real name). She looked okay (used to model), worked in artificial intelligence (which requires real intelligence, naturally), was talkative without resorting to shallow conversation, and was quite friendly towards me. So, right after our last class, I asked her to lunch. No big deal, right? Barely qualifies as a date, if at all, right? She agreed, gave me her business card, and told me to call her to make arrangements the next week.

Kathy had to miss a couple of days of work, but Thursday I reached her and we made arrangements for lunch the next Monday. Note: she agreed to this.

Well, Monday comes and when I call Kathy's office to pick a place to eat, I find out Kathy went home sick at 10:30 with a migraine. The person I talked to thought she might be out for several days, so, trying to be a nice guy, I looked her up on the Electronic Mail account list, and sent her this little message:

> If you're reading this, that probably means you're feeling better. Good! I hope it sticks this time. Take care.
>
> MRK

This would be waiting for her when she got back, so I wouldn't have to bother her officemates every day. It's darn nice, too, I thought. The only reason I have a copy of it, though, is because Kathy forwarded it to me the next day attached to this:

> Hi Mark
>
> This has not been a good two weeks for me. My dad had bypass surgery last week and yesterday I went home with a migraine and found out that my dog had gotten out and killed the neighbour's cat.
>
> Anyway, I suppose that it is just as well because I can't in good conscience go to lunch with you. A relationship that I considered over with has sort of resurfaced. I don't really want to complicate things (namely my life).
>
> Thanks for the invitation though.
>
> Kathy

I like the use of the word "resurfaced", like she's talking about a swamp monster rising from the bog. Still, this is puzzling to me. I feel like Captain White Bread of the 1990's, but she won't go out with me because she can't do so "in good conscience". Just in case my true motives were in question, I sent

a response. I wish I'd said something like "Blast it, Jim, I'm a person, not a complication!" Even so, I thought this would suffice .

"Pipe down! You're talking to a tourist who's every move's among the purist "

"I get my kicks ABOVE the waistline, Sunshine!

-Murray Head,
"One Night In Bangkok"

I'm sorry you've had a rough time lately. I thought my week was crummy but now I know better

Last night, I made arrangements to spend two evenings with two different married women What's more, their husbands approve. This should help establish two things:

a) I am the least threatening single male in the Western world outside the priesthood, and

b) I am not motivated by the pursuit of a "relationship (whatever the heck that is). I simply enjoy spending time with interesting people. I'm afraid you still qualify, so my invitation holds, "relationship" or no

The rest is up to you. I've stated my case as best and concisely as I can, and you're a mature, intelligent woman perfectly capable of making good, fair decisions, at this point, if you choose to ignore me, I promise I'll go away

-MRK

I honestly thought this was really cool. If she was worried about me being led on (or having ulterior motives, as they say), I've relieved her of that And if she'd just decided she didn't like the idea, she can just leave me alone and forget all about it. Easy, right?

Obviously, I'd forgotten nothing comes easy in this area. I got a reply (mistakes hers), but it wasn't "okay"

Mark,

Of all the fantasies people can conceive, the most thrilling and hard to reckon with, is reality

How do you say to someone something that you feel, but cannot say. Life permits what society dictates . . . do you think that is right?

Are all thoughts permissible, even when they hurt?

Should pain stand alone and be objectively understood?

I hope we can understand each other, when I say that we are of different times, at different places

What you consider to be a mystery I know is obvious; and what I am confused about, you view as common place

My philosophy is: Be myself in my own time at my own pace.

Perhaps it can be yours,

By now, I'm beginning to think I'm reading someone else's mail (Did I ask her to lunch or did I propose?") She doesn't seem to be talking about me as I perceive myself or as I'm perceived by people who know me. But obviously, there is a problem

Attempting to explain myself, I typed this up.

Not quite three weeks ago, I asked a new acquaintance if she'd like to go to lunch. Why do I feel today like Heathcliffe from Wuthering Heights?

I'd hoped my last correspondence would make this easier; obviously it didn't work. The idea was to reassure you if you liked the idea of lunch but were suspicious as to my intentions, and give you an easy out if you wanted to forget the issue. Instead, I'm greeted before my first cup of coffee Monday morning with Lord Byron-experiments-with-stream-of-consciousness-writing Forgive me if I sound like I'm making light of it. It's just that I can read most of it any of six different ways, and I'm not satisfied by this it-looks-like-"no"-but-she never-even-used-that word feeling it leaves me with Anyway, since you didn't ignore me: I don't feel obligated to go away yet.

Rather than dissect the entire letter, I'll concentrate on three lines.

1. "Life permits what society dictates . . . do you think that's right?"

I think it's wrong as in "unfair" and as in "incorrect". I don't let society dictate anything to me I'm a Christian, and to ME the word means I try to emulate Christ in such a way that others will wish to get to know Him (This doesn't mean I'm trying to evangelize you. I only bring this up because I feel it's relevant). Christ spent lots of time with women Martha, several Marys, and the women at the well off the top of my head - and always treated them with love and respect even though He never married. This doesn't mean I can't marry, but it does mean I don't need to do so to spend time with women.

2. "I hope we can understand each other when I say that we are of different times, at different places " First, you barely know me! How can you make such a far-reaching statement? Second, even if that statement is true, that's what makes the whole idea interesting to me in the first place. Plus, if I only allowed myself the company of people of the same time and same place, I'd be in the mountains of Tibet contemplating my naval. (Trust me on this one) so, in short, no, I don't understand.

2 a). "What you consider a mystery I know is obvious; and what I am confused about, you view as common place."

3) "My philosophy is. Be myself in my own time at my own pace. Perhaps it can be yours."

I'm afraid I can't read this sentence without inferring that you think my philosophy is "be what I'm not at someone else's time and pace." I hope you didn't mean it that way, because it'd hurt to think I'm perceived that way and I believe it's incorrect

I can keep this up forever, but I don't sense you're enjoying this and I don't want to keep this up if it gets mean. I'm not sure why I care so much about what you think about me any more than I'm sure why you feel you must explain yourself when you never owed me (or anyone) an explanation, or why you've never owed me (or anyone) an explanation, or why you've never said "no", or why you took it all so much more seriously than I did. I honestly can't imagine why you're hurting over all this, and I'm very sorry it came to that.

All I really wanted was to be friends. That's all

-MRK

For several reasons, I changed my mind and sent this instead.

"There's three sides to every story

There's yours and mine and the cold, hard truth"

- Don Henley,
"Long Way Home"

I'm still a bit mystified by all this, but I've decided not to take

any of what you're saying personally. Because if I do, I feel you're either tremendously oversimplifying or you just have a completely wrong idea of what kind of person I am.

I wrote an extensive reply to your last correspondence, but I'm not going to send it. It spends a lot of time addressing things I've since decided are relatively insignificant. Suffice to say: since you never owed me any explanation at all, I won't quibble about an explanation I'm not satisfied with.

I'm sorry you're hurting. And I'm sorry if part of that is somehow my fault. All I want to do is help. Right now, it looks like the best way for me to do that is to leave you alone. So I will.

MRK

Think I sent the right letter?

This is all water under the bridge, as they say, so I'm not worried about how to solve the situation. (Indeed, there is no situation; it's over). I am curious if there's any nuance to Kathy's point of view I'm missing. (I have several theories, but any one of them falls down because of at least one aspect of this whole thing) so if any female readers identify with Kathy's point of view, I wouldn't mind hearing about it. But the main reason I wrote this up is I just felt like talking about it. So I did.

Thanks for reading all this nonsense.

Sincerely,

Mark Kusenberger
2719 Northland
San Antonio, TX
USA 78217-4527

P.S. *Cerebus* is better than ever and I'm sticking with you, Dave, price increase or no.

P.P.S. We're installing a new mainframe in our office and I'm pushing to have it called "Cerebus". Wish me luck.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave & Gerhard,

I know nothing about drawing or art. I simply know what I like (not unlike millions of other people). I can respect technical ability even if I can't stand the actual work and ultimately I simply try to enjoy while not being swayed by psuedo dickhead. I don't know who does what between Gerhard and yourself and I don't really care. I only know that you do it well.

When Pud and the old geezer were shot I was, to use some typically cockney phraseology, completely gutted and having Nursey and Mrs. T turn up was a master stroke in a tale that I felt (forgive me) was meandering slightly. The caricature is brilliant. All this time I have been waiting for Cerebus to swing in 'roach-like' and sort everything out. It's kind of depressing to think that even a barbarian earth-pig can be as impotent as the rest of us.

Speaking of impotence I have been surprised and gratified to see how many self-confessed wankers there are amongst Cerebus fans but their ignorance is appalling. Wanking is best left as a solitary, (not necessarily nocturnal) activity, not consuming valuable letters page space.

To add my two pence (cents for my trans-atlantic cousins) worth to the on-going sagas in this letter page:

Women are wonderful except for the ones that are bitches.

Who gives a shit about Pink Floyd or any of the other frankly dodgy bands that have been mentioned recently? Where are the fans of Happy Mondays, Soup Dragons, Candy Flip or the quintessentially stupendous *PRINCE*? Do all you people have so little taste?

John
Flat 6
Stanlake Road
Shepherds Bush, W.12
London, England

P.S. Sorry about the letter. Just put it down to abnormal amounts of electrical activity in the brain.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Recently, I attended a convention in New York City. There my friend came running up to me saying that one of the booths had copies of the *Six Deadly Sins* portfolio. When I looked at them I noticed that there were two editions. One was signed and the other wasn't. I was only concerned with the art and was not about to pay $80 for a signed edition so I spent $20 instead. I'm really just concerned about if you know about this or is Steve Shanes trying to screw you? I've enclosed the order form. It only lists the signed one but, I'll gladly give my copy if necessary. I bought CEREBUS 136. I thought it was great. It's good to see Cerebus again.

Thanks for your time.

Paul Benincasa
1663 Cornelius Avenue
Wantagh, NY
USA 1179

P.S. Hope I've been of help. I love Mrs. Thatcher!!!

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I have never had my address witheld before.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Bober
(address witheld)

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

I realize that you're probably going to be swamped with mail over the conclusion to *Jaka's Story*, but I at least wanted to show my appreciation.

You certainly kept us on our toes until the last issue (hell, to the last page). All through the series, debates raged among our close circle of Aardvark worshippers over what you had planned. Some thought Pud would rape Jaka and be killed by Cerebus. Some thought Jaka would just give up on Rick. I thought she would stay with him and force Cerebus to leave. Anything was possible. You certainly proved that.

But what, you may be wondering, is the point? Just this. Please don't die before issue 300!!! Not only would the world be losing a great writer - we would never find out what happens!! So many nagging little things (like Cerebus sneezing fire) would remain unexplained. I bet you don't have the plot-line written out and locked up in a drawer somewhere. I bet Gerhard doesn't have a clue. You probably don't even know what's going on until it magically spurts from your pen. So please, Dave, eat right. Be careful crossing the street. Wear a condom. Don't wrestle alligators. Handle toxic waste in a mature and responsible manner.

Good God, I'm beginning to sound like my mother!!

O.K. Forget all that. Do whatever you like, but just *write something down* and leave it in a safety box somewhere (or send it to me). My sanity (and that of twenty-some odd thousand others) may very well depend on it!!!

And on a lighter note, bring the roach back as soon as possible. After a story like this one, we could all use some levity. Something like Ironroach or Speedyroach ("Moving faster than the eye can follow, Speedyroach darts through the back alleyways! Zip! Ptaang! Ctash!"). But then I'm sure you have something even better just a-waiting in the wings.

And on a personal note, am I the only being on the planet that doesn't find *Calvin & Hobbes* funny? My brother Steve says it's because I was never a child. But I was and have the embarrassing photos to prove it.

Before closing I would like to make a semi-public apology to my girl friend, Ali, for putting up with my ravings about Cerebus for the past year and a half. She is, as of yet, unenlightened to the glories of the Aardvark. But there is hope.

Wow. An entire letter and I didn't mention a favorite band or sexual pastime in the whole thing. I think that deserves a personal letter, Dave.

Never turn your back on a penguin.

Christopher D. Tatro
165 Euclid St.
Athol (yes, I know what it sounds like), MA
USA 01331

P.S. Big Spoon.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

As we approach the conclusion of *Jaka's Story*, I'm compelled to take a leap upon a soapbox. When you stated "how grisly" the state of the comic book industry is, I'm not sure even you realize how bad it is. The Big Two are reduced to endlessly repeating superhero stories. I have to admit DC has done a fine job of recreating some older characters. The reason for this outburst of creativity is the fine CREATIVE people they've hired. Now a few of the independents are poised on the brink of ruin, not that they have been producing much material that is appreciably different from the Big Two. The indies that remain also choose to recreate other properties that they have acquired the rights to. I'm not saying that some of these books don't look or read well, what I *am* saying is that this isn't the lowest depth that the industry has sunk. How about the slimey tendency some of these publishers have to print these soft porn books? You might think I'm a prude or some such nonsense. Not true. I like *Omaha*. I'm not adverse to MATURE adult material. Most of this crap is made for boys who shouldn't be allowed to buy it. Here is the low point on my depth chart. Soon we'll be seeing *Debbie Does Dallas* in our local comic shops. If this trend in shitty comics continues the industry is going to receive quite a beating from the conservative elements in this country that are calling for censorship.

I wish there were more people in the business who are willing to take a chance and be creative. I'd like to see more worlds made from whole cloth in which I give a damn about the characters. I don't necessarily mean that anyone should mimic you and try to do a novel in comics form. More self-publishing would be great, but I'm not sure that it's possible unless you're already an established talent with some fan support. Frightening, isn't it?

I've been with you since #23, and I haven't regretted a moment. I haven't always understood what you were doing, but eventually things would gel, though not always (as in the dream sequences). While everyone I know was bitching that nothing was happening in *Jaka's Story* I could see that you lulling us to sleep with the regularity of Jaka's, Rick's, and Pud's intertwining lives. What a beautiful stroke of irony that Pud was killed before he could act out his repressed sexual fantasies. I eagerly await the twenty-third and final part of *Jaka's Story*. I also wonder what the little greyhaired bastard has been up to.

Michael A. Barreiro
1024 Indiana Avenue
Glassport, PA
USA 15045

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

There are few things in this world that irk me enough to cross the line from comics reader to Comments writer, but CENSORSHIP is the A #1 Big Daddy of them all. I realize Mr. Eric Hamlin (issue 136) may have "used to really enjoy your column," however, a lot of people also used to really enjoy the '60's. Things change, Eric - LIGHTEN UP!!

I have faith in you, Dave. Surely you of all people are not going to let some holier-than-thou self-proclaimed editor tell you how to run your letters column. It *is* YOUR column, after all. Who died and left him the red pen? I say, if you don't like it, *don't read it!* When he has his own world-reknowned comic magazine, he can do as he pleases.

As for myself, I really enjoy every aspect of your book . . . especially the letters. You are probably the only guy who does answer his own mail in this business. That's great! I hope you always will. It's that personal touch that keeps the human in humanity.

Enough sappiness. Would you believe that even though I date the manager of a prominent comic shop I still don't get to see your book every month? Usually he brings home only one, and those I have to sneak a peek at while he works on his own comic. To make matters worse, between his reading your comic (among others) and writing his own comic, I can hardly get a glance in edgewise, much less a quick smooch. Do you suppose this is the reason all those poor saps have always just lost their best girl? You'll be happy to note that ours is one relationship that stands undaunted against 136 issues of Cerebus, not to mention all the extra compilations and such.

Anyway, here's to another 164 clandestine meetings with you. I love your work. You're the best! (At your business, that is.) - The Punk is 2nd though.

Fondly, if not somewhat secretively,
The Atomic Bombshell

P.S. How do you feel about the fact that you seem to distract so many young men from their studies and papers?

I didn't figure it kept you up nights.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dearest Dave,

First off, please notice the similarities in our post office box numbers. 8x2=16. The 74 is, of course the same. Synchronicity, or mere coincidence? I'll let you decide.

Regarding this maryjane "habit" you are kicking or have kicked, what are your reasons for doing this exactly? Robert Anton Wilson believes that marijuana and tantric sex are among the few ways most people have of reaching Leary's "fifth circuit" of human development (most adults are on the third or fourth circuit. Beethoven, for example, was able to reach fifth circuit). People able to reach this circuit are not only happier, but healthier — fifth circuit people rarely have any physical complaints. Marijuana has been used ceremoniously for centuries by a variety of cultures to attain illumination. And it's not as destructive as beer or hard liquor to most people. If you eat it rather than smoke it, it's probably as close to a harmless altered state as you can get.

So, what are your reasons anyway? If subsequent issues of *Cerebus* are anything less than brilliant, I'll assume that this is a direct result of "kicking your doobage habit." Regardless, please use what "Stan the Bat" left of your free will to do whatever it is you would like to do. Gawd, I am glad I'm not that uptight and accusatory!

Any chance we'll see just the text from *Jaka's Story* reprinted in a paperback version? That would be pretty cool!

And in response to J. Brandt Dilworth's invitation to tea . . . I'll bring the scones, but I usually don't travel south of the Mason-Dixon line . . . Gotta go, Uncle Red just came to visit!

Love and Kisses,

Connie Lingus
JAF Box 8274
New York, NY
USA 10116-4651

P.S. This was returned by the post office - are they trying to censor me?

★★★★★★★★★★

**Connie Lingus, 1990.**

Dear Dave,

Hi. How are you? I was just looking through the extensive Aardvark Comment in issue 136, and I noticed that not a single person took space in her/his/its letter to just say "Hi, Dave, how are you?" (although KeeKoo of Forest Hills, NY did inquire as to Cerebus' status. Way to go, KeeKoo!)

Hi Gerhard. Do you have a middle name?

Y'know Dave, the Beatles produced the most amazing and beautiful music. If anyone disagrees with me, please listen to "Two of Us" or "Across the Universe", which are found on *Let it Be*. Any group who can create music that fantastic whilst in the throes of a breakup has to be a band of geniuses (even Ringo). In fact, John Lennon admitted to being one.

You, Dave, however, (too, many, commas) are a wacky funster. Come on, you know you are. Yes you do.

Anyway, I was in a record store lookin' at the Beatles album which contained "Two of Us" (the aforementioned *Let It Be*) when I overheard this guy and a little kid talking. The kid pointed at Public Enemy's newest disc (Mega-Cool Way-Good stuff, by the by) and said, "I hate those guys."

"Fine," I thought, "It's just some dumb little kid who doesn't know any better. He'll learn." But my woes didn't end there. Nosiree, Dave! The guy then turns to the kid and says, he says, and I quote: "You know what those guys are? Coons. Junglebunnies. Niggers."

Or some sort of BULLSHIT like that.

Like this wasn't bad enough, the little kid then procedes to giggle, as if he had just watched the guy pull a quarter out of his Asshole! That's what really got to me. Watching a little kid giggle at the words "coon" and "nigger". I hate. Hate HATE *HATE* those words! I mean, I know they are only words but...

My hands tightened around *Past Masters 2* and I just stared at the guy. I felt like yelling "You Stupid FUCK!" or something equally as witty and clever, and then belting him as hard as I could, like Rick did to Jaka (which in no way means I support Rick's actions). I wanted to snuff out this bigot, this Nazi klansman, this embodiment of evil in a record store. But I didn't. I instead bought a new tape and went about my business.

Don't people see? In *Jaka's Story*, didn't Rick see that he was so lazy he never would have been able to afford raising a child anyway? Couldn't he see Jaka's life of frustration and suffering? Couldn't the Ciminists see that abortion isn't wrong if it saves an innocent from being born into a life of poverty, starvation, and shit? Couldn't the guy in the record store see that black people aren't coons, but humans with darker skins than his own? Does that little kid see that he's going to grow up to be racist?

Thank you Dave, for writing and drawing the best comic in the industry. You're characters really exist somewhere, I know it. They feel the same things I feel, dream the same dreams, and do the same stupid things I do. Your letters page is like another group of friends with whom I can sympathize or disagree. You've created a very special world between the covers. As John Lennon sings, "Nothin's gonna change my world." Praise Tarim.

Aggle Aggle Aggle,

Phil "the Shortguy" Ristaino
52 Southgate Rd.
Franklin, MA
USA 02138

P.S. Pretty depressing for my first fanboy letter, huh? Gerhard, you draw the best damn backrounds I've ever seen. Now excuse me while I wipe the dirt off my knees and the brown off my nose.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim,

I would like your permission to use the following characters in my upcoming graphic narrative, THE HALLUCINOGENIC SPIDER. Jaka, Pud Withers, and Cerebus. I had a dream which featured those characters for a brief part of the dream and I wish to include them in the dream sequence when I incorporate it into my graphic narrative. While they appeared briefly in the dream, I feel they are integral in transmitting what the dream is about. In fact, I feel their presence in the dream defines the message.

Thank you for your time.

Jeff Stoneking
302 3rd Ave. NE. Apt. #201
Waseca, MN
USA 56093

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave and Ger:

First of all, CONGRATS on finishing *Jaka's Story*. It's been a hell of a story. Although it was boring at times, over the last two years it has scared, outraged and most importantly, entertained me. Through it all the writing and artwork have been superb . . . but I've come to expect that from yinse (Pittsburgh-ism) guys by now. Thanks.

Secondly, in the issue 136 letter column Christian Walters asked about shaving pubic hair. Well, let me tell you son: there's an awful lot to be said for muff-less muff diving. The only problem is finding a woman that wants to go to the trouble of shaving it off in the first place. And besides, a little pubic stubble is a small price to pay for the unobstructed view-of/access-to the female anatomy.

Anyway, that's my two cents.

Dan Reiner
Latrobe, PA

"We can make BEANS into PEAS!"

★★★★★★★★★★

Hi Dave -

I just reread my letter in 136 and, disappointed with myself for sounding so sappy, I figured I'd write another, more levelheaded note.

Before I get to that, thank you for your note and your good wishes. I'm back home now, having survived my graduation, and will begin work in a week at a local public relations office. Sold my soul at a young age, I suppose.

On the end of *Jaka's Story*: I remember you saying, sometime during *Church and State*, I think, that we bring all this on ourselves. We clamor and cry for Jaka to return, forcing you to devise some new way to break her heart. And ours.

Well, I'd say you managed that pretty well this time out. Now I imagine we'll have to wait another 30 issues or so to find out how she recovers, and what you've got in mind for her next. I guess I'd like to know if we'll ever see Rick again. You said at the start of *Jaka's Story* that we'd seen 2 of the characters before (I assume you were excluding Cerebus and meant Jaka and Lord Julius) and that the others won't affect the later storylines. Even if he doesn't affect things down the line, I hope Rick pops up again. It's tough watching someone leave, never to return, when they're in a bad state. Still, I suppose that's just like life, isn't it?

I won't say things like "loved the art" (though I did) or "loved the writing" (though I did), because if I didn't, I wouldn't be reading, would I? Still, only because I think it really deserves mention, I'd like to compliment you on the lettering. A slower-paced story, like *Jaka's Story*, really relies on the dialogue, and your lettering was dynamite, especially in the case of Mrs. Thatcher. Obviously a lot more thought goes into her lettering than I had ever noticed. I'm noticing now.

Funny story for you before I go. A big-time Marvel Professional was at the comic shop this past weekend, touring to promote his mag, so I dug out some old copies of the Professional's work and drove on down and got in line.

I remember you used to gripe about cons and signings and I used to think

you were being pretty sensitive, figuring you were getting paid to sit and sign and sketch and that you were getting good publicity for the mag. Of course, I had never been to a con or a signing.

Well, now, I hereby apologize for doubting you. The line stretched up and down the aisles and the Professional sat behind the counter, eyes fairly glazed as fan after fan sat stack after stack of *Foam Man and Meat Boy* or *Uncanny Strange Adventures* in front of him to sign. Make no mistake, the Professional was very friendly and chatted with anyone who wanted to chat quite amiably, but you could tell the grip and grin circuit was wearing on him. And we certainly weren't showing any mercy.

So anyway, while the Professional was busy with fifteen identical copies of a comic for a charity he had contributed to (and I'm *sure* the kid who owned them was going to sell all the autographed copies and then donate the proceeds to the nearest foodbank) I was watching this 11-year-old kid immediately in front of me. His face was all twisted around and it was apparent he was trying to think of a suitable question for this Big Name Professional Sitting Three Feet Away.

Finally, the kid asks: "Which company do you like to work for better, Marvel or DC?"

So the Professional responds (and quite reasonably, I think,) that he prefers one of the companies to the other because he likes Company Y's bookkeeping better than Company X's because he's 40 years old and he likes to know his next check is going to be there.

Understand. I don't intend any criticism of the Professional. I think it's perfectly reasonable to want to know you're going to be paid. I'm well aware that the comics industry is a business and that people in that industry write, draw, letter and edit to keep food on the table. And I happen to think this Professional's done some nice work at both companies. And I don't think he's necessarily compromised anything in doing what he's been doing.

Still, you get this picture of Michelangelo saying, "Yeah, the Sistine Chapel is nice, but I'd rather wallpaper the supermarket, where I know I'll get paid on time."

I just feel bad for an industry where bookkeeping is the primary motivating force. It shatters those fanboy illusions, you know? And you know who we have to thank- those two one-eyed ogres in New York that created all those illusions.

What a hypocrite I am! I mean, none of the above kept me from getting my copy of *Foam Man* signed, did it? I guess I still haven't outgrown my fanboy ways, despite my ability to recognize things like the above.

But I like to think I'm getting better.

Best,

Adam Beechen
7126 N 19th Avenue, #199
Phoenix, AZ. USA 85021

P.S. I've enclosed a couple of copies of the cartoon strip I did for my college paper. The first one was from a series involving Elvis' arrival at North Western to finish his pharmacology degree. That last 3 are from the final month of school. Plain to see what my mind was on, eh?
Anyhoo, the strip's called *Sensahuma* and I thought you might get a kick out of 'em.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

I just wanted to comment on the last two letters in #135. I'd like to know if any ancient Taoists are still alive, and if they are, could they give me a few pointers? Furthermore, I also never noticed (until Elizabeth brilliantly pointed it out) that you were effortlessly writing a woman's story, and seemingly doing it right. Even though it is in the guise of Oscar Wilde, you are still the one behind the pen. I assume, as Elizabeth pointed out, that you are writing Jaka as a character, and not specifically as a woman. I believe that mentally, men and women aren't much different. With *Jaka's Story*, you seem to be proving the validity of that belief.

I'd also like to thank M'Oak for his hilarious recollection of a night at McDonald's.

Yves Grant
26 Aberdeen St., Newton, MA
USA 02161

P.S. One day when I was bored, I was watching "Love Connection" and was dismayed to see a woman with the same name as mine, complete with the same spelling. For all of my life I've had to explain to others that my name is the male version of "Eve" whenever some wise-ass dimwit would snicker "Adam and Eve" thinking he invented the joke. Now I find that some women spell their name the same way mine is spelled. Isn't the purpose of a different spelling so that at least in print you will know if I'm male or female, or does that depend on writing style? Why can't life be simpler?

★★★★★★★★★★

Hi Dave,

Getting sick of me yet? I'm sorry to flood your mailbox like this, but something about the letter I sent you the other day has been bothering me, so I thought I'd try to clarify it before someone got the wrong idea.

It occurred to me how easily my other letter could be misconstrued. I truly didn't mean to sound superior, suggesting that I exist for only the purest of motives and that I looked down on anyone who didn't. I don't think anyone lives by the purest of motives. That's the way the world works, and I recognize that.

I guess my point, the point I was *really* trying to make, was that when you grow up a comic book fan, as many of us do, and you live and die by the characters, as I know I did, you naturally assume that those lucky ducks who write and draw *Uncanny Strange Adventures* care about the characters as much as we do. And even though we grow up and learn how the world really works, it still comes as a shock to hear words such as the Professional's, especially when put so bluntly.

There seems to be less innocence to collecting these days. Instead of picking up a comic because the cover looked cool and one really wondered if the Thing could kick the Hulk's ass, now we have "Gold Cover", "Silver Cover" and "Regular" first editions of the new *Spider Man* comic. And articles about six-figure contracts. And kids with fifteen copies of charity comic books. That just makes me feel a little weird. Especially while standing in line to have a comic autographed myself. And that's all I was really trying to say.

I'll probably still get lashed for all of this, but at least I feel I've made myself a little clearer.

I promise I'll leave your mailbox alone for a little while now, Dave.

Best,

Adam Beechen
7126 N. 19th Avenue, #199
Phoenix, AZ. USA 85021

★★★★★★★★★★

To Readers of "Aardvark Comment",

This note is intended to alert you to the grievous error in Chip's letter in issue #137. Chip says (and I quote), ". . . I'm gonna go grab some Zapp's 'craw-taters' (the best potato chips in the country) . . ." Aside from the glaring grammatical error ("gonna"), and notwithstanding the effective use of alliteration ("gonna go grab"), Zapp's "craw-taters" *cannot* be the best potato chip in the country because State Line potato chips out of Wilbraham Massachusetts are the best chips in this, or any, country, world or universe!!!

Thank you for your attention.

Closed-mindedly yours,

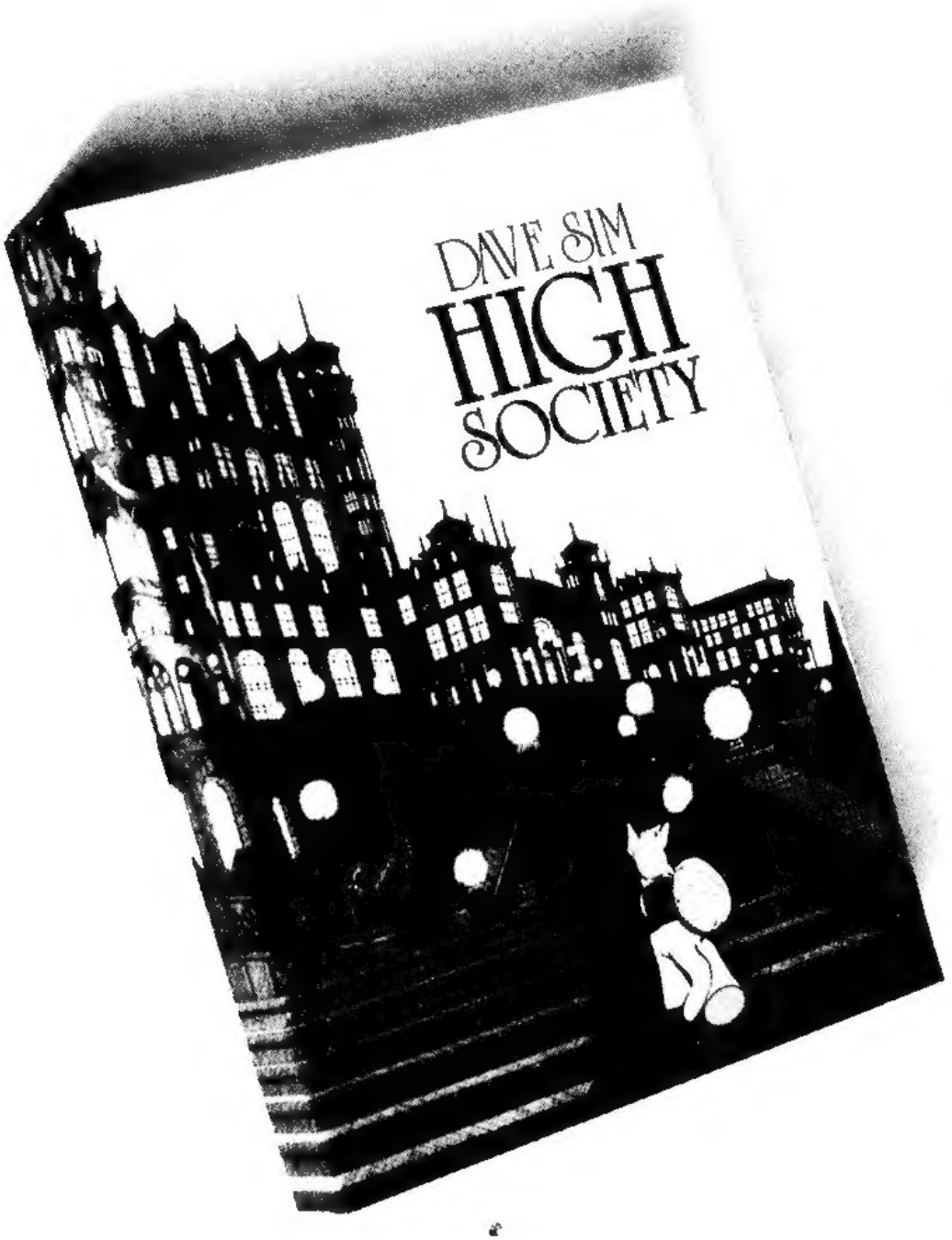
Stephen "State Line" Benedetti
915-D W. Aaron Drive
State College, PA. USA 16803

P.S. Do you want a kitten?

CEREBUS
1991

DAVE SIM
CEREBUS

CEREBUS
1991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